NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5606 APRIL 10, 1978
WAYNE COREY ARANYAPRATHET

THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER

ANNCR:

CLASHES ALONG THE BORDER BETWEEN THAILAND AND CAMBODIA HAVE BECOME AN ALMOST DAILY OCCURENCE DESPITE OFFICIAL STATEMENTS BY BOTH COUNTRIES SAYING THEY WANT GOOD RELATIONS WITH EACH OTHER. FROM THE THAI BORDER TOWN OF ARANYAPRATHET, WAYNE COREY HAS THIS REPORT ON A CONFRONTATION WHICH SEEMS UNLIKELY TO END IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

VOICE:

ABOUT A WEEK AGO, THE CAMBODIANS, FROM A POSITION NEAR THEIR BORDER TOWN OF POIPET FIRED THREE MORTAR ROUNDS INTO THAILAND. THEY LANDED IN AN OPEN AREA NEAR THE RAILROAD STATION ON THE EDGE OF ARANYAPRATHET. THEY WERE BIGGER MORTAR SHELLS THAN HAD BEEN USED BEFORE. AS USUAL THE MOTIVATION BEHIND SUCH ATTACKS IS NOT EASILY UNDERSTOOD. BUT THE LATEST MORTAR ATTACK COULD BE IN RETALIATION FOR WHAT THE CAMBODIANS THINK WAS SOME KIND OF PROVOCATION BY THAILAND.

THAI SOURCES HERE IN ARANYAPRATHET SAY THE CAMBODIANS ARE SUPPORTING THAI COMMUNISTS WHO THE AUTHORITIES SAY WANT TO CREATE LIBERATED AREAS ALONG MUCH OF THAILAND'S EASTERN BORDER. THE THAI COMMUNISTS HAVE MADE SOME PROGRESS IN DOING THIS. THE ROAD LEADING FROM ARANYAPRATHET TO A STRING OF VILLAGES NORTH OF HERE IS NO LONGER SAFE FOR CIVILIAN TRAVEL. THAI COMMUNIST PATROLS, AND OCCASIONALLY SMALL CAMBODIAN COMMUNIST UNITS, OPERATE IN THAT AREA EVEN IN THE DAY TIME.

THAI BORDER PATROL POLICE DISCOURAGE CORRESPONDENTS FROM VENTURING TOO CLOSE TO THE BRIDGE WHICH USED TO BE THE MAIN CROSSING POINT FROM THAILAND INTO CAMBODIA. THEY SAY THE

CAMBODIANS MAY SHOOT AT ANYTHING THA MOVES ON THE THAI SIDE OF THE BRIDGE. THERE IS NO SHOOTING NOW BUT THE ATMOSPHERE IS STILL UNNATURAL.

WHILE THAI DIPLOMATS TRY TO PERSUADE CAMBODIA TO BE FRIENDLY, LIFE ALONG THIS BORDER IS HARD ON THE BORDER PATROL POLICE WHO ARE THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE. THE POLICE STATION A FEW HUNDRED METERS FROM THE BORDER WAS THE TARGET OF CAMBODIAN SMALL ARMS FIRE LATE LAST WEEK. THRE WERE NO CASUALTIES OR DAMAGE, BUT A LOT OF NERVOUSNESS IS EVIDENT.

ONE THAI POLICEMAN SITTING QUIETLY IN THE SHADE, STRIPPED DOWN TO HIS SHORTS BECAUSE OF THE SUFFOCATING HEAT, WONDERS WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT. HE SAYS HE WOULD BE GLAD IF THE CAMBODIANS STOPPED CAUSING TROUBLE AND WOULD BE FRIENDLY WITH THAILAND. HE HOPES THE CAMBODIANS WON'T LAUNCH ANY MAJOR ATTACK ON APRIL SEVENTEENTH THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER OF PHNOM PENH.

NO ONE HERE ON THE FRONT LINE SEES ANY WAY TO END THE BORDER CLASHES SOON. SO, CAUTION IS THE BYWORD AND RESIGNATION IS THE DOMINANT MOOD. ANOTHER DAY PASSES....THIS ONE FREE OF TROUBLE. BUT A THAI POLICEMAN BRANDISHING A GRENADE LAUNCHER SETS OFF A MOTORCYCE FOR A POLICE POST JUST TO THE SOUTH FOR ROUTINE DUTY. HE SMILES BROADLY AS HE WAVES TO HIS FRIENDS. MAYBE IT IS ONLY A BRAVE SMILE, BUT IT HELPS TO BRIGHTEN THE ATMOSPHERE.

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JS/RTD